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ABSTRACT

Ten New Zealand kindergartens, play centers, and child care centers were studied to assess the consequences of government-mandated charter development. Issues related to the charter document, consultation, effects on centers and participants, government bureaucracy, and the impact of becoming chartered were examined. It was found that there was considerable variation in the ways in which parents were consulted and involved in charter preparation, and there was little consultation at the community level. Charters were perceived to be a requirement imposed from above. Staff, committees, and managers had to address the quality of their relationships with parents in order to deal positively with charter development. Charters did not affect the center environment for children to any substantial extent, except in such areas as the inclusion of Maori and cultural activities. A major source of frustration was the short time period for charter preparation. The charters developed by centers proved to be useful as reference sources that could serve as a basis for future evaluations. Because of the many positive outcomes of charter development for centers, it was recommended that the government requirement to charter early childhood centers be retained. Contains 30 references. (LB)

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Research Report to the Ministry of Education
Research and Statistics Division

Quality in early childhood centres
Report one

Experiences of charter development in early childhood centres in 1990

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April, 1991

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE PROJECT

The project on "Quality in Early Education and Care: A study of Charter Development Processes and Outcomes" was carried out from the University of Otago and funded by the Ministry of Education. The research contract was from November 1989 until November 1991. One major aim of the project was to investigate the process of charter development in early childhood centres. This included an examination of

- consultation procedures
- document preparation
- consequences of charter development

THIS REPORT

This report contains the findings relating to charter development. Ten different early childhood centres (kindergartens, playcentres, and childcare centres) took part in this section of the study during 1990. A collaborative research approach was taken. Centre meetings were observed and individual discussions and meetings with the different participants were held. Joint meetings of representatives from each of the centres were organized. Participants received periodic feedback of results for their information and to comment upon if they wished.

KEY FINDINGS

The Charter Document

Writing the charter document was mainly the responsibility of managers, including charter committees and/or staff (3.1.1). While kindergartens and playcentres found the skeleton charters prepared by their associations useful, they could have benefited more from this assistance if it had been received before they started charter development (3.1.1). There was considerable variation between the three services in how parents were consulted and involved in charter preparation (3.1.1). Charters were perceived to be a requirement that was imposed on them "from above". The Ministry were seen to be re-defining the meaning of "negotiation" because what charters covered and stated had to be approved by the Ministry and adhere to requirements (3.1.2).

Consultation

Consultation efforts were mainly focussed upon the parents, and there seemed to be little concern for consultation at the community level (3.2.1). Up to 16 different methods of consultation were employed. Kindergartens and playcentres used a greater variety of ways on average than the childcare centres (3.2.2). Carrying out consultation was not found to be easy. Problems included: parent apathy, negative feedback, and poor attendance rates at formal meetings (3.2.3). Some ingenious techniques and variations to the

common methods of consultation helped to encourage involvement in the consultative process (3.2.4).

The most contentious charter principles and requirements were those relating to the Treaty of Waitangi and special needs sections of the guidelines in the *Early Childhood Management Handbook* (3.2.5). There was however, general agreement with the ideas contained in all of the principles. It was the practical implementation of some of the principles that was of concern: for example, the need to have adequate staffing and facilities before special needs children could be enroled (3.2.5).

Effects on Centres and Participants

Developing a charter was a learning process for everyone (3.3.1). Some negative and uninformed feedback from parents in a few centres was received during consultation. Staff, committees and managers had to address the quality of their relationships with parents to deal positively with this (3.3.2). Where there was already good centre-family communication or centres were concerned to promote this, more effort was placed on obtaining parent involvement in the process (3.3.2). Most staff (especially the kindergarten teachers) felt that the consultation process tended to be of benefit to the parents rather than to them. Consultation however, helped them to learn parents' views and opinions. A particular benefit in childcare was enhanced communication between the levels of management, staff, and parents (3.3.2).

Centres now have written documentation on their philosophies and practices (3.3.3). Some centres, namely kindergartens and one childcare centre, have made adjustments to their staffing policies as a result of the charter requirements for staffing (3.3.4). Centre representatives reported that charters did not affect the centre environment for children to any substantial extent, although some changes were made in response to specific charter requirements, in particular the inclusion of taha Maori and cultural activities (3.3.5). But, as mentioned in Chapter 4, such changes may be surface ones because other factors influence the effects of them.

Government Bureaucracy

The charter development process was perceived as "government bureaucracy" (3.4). Only towards the end and after the process was completed, did people realise that it had benefits and start to capitalize on these (3.3, 3.5.1). A major source of frustration was the short time-frame for charter preparation. This appears to have had implications for consultation and to have led to the rushed manner in which most charter were documents produced (3.4.1). The emotional effects of having the rules for charter development and approval change in mid-stream were serious, and may have long-term implications (3.4.1 to 3.4.4).

The Impact of Becoming Chartered

As a result of preparing a charter, centres now have a document they can use for resource purposes, as a reference source, and as a basis for future evaluations of practices and policies (3.5.1). Centres now have a greater understanding and consciousness of their accountability, including the government's ability to control and monitor centre quality (3.5.2).

Recommendations

The many positive outcomes and benefits of charter development for centres means that the requirement to charter should be retained.

However, it is important that the new government and their officials examine the likely consequences, identified in this report, of the introduction of policy which has not been trialled or fully developed. Early Childhood Development Unit, Education Review Office, and the Ministry of Education should continue to be aware of the concern centres have that good communication, and agreement on interpretations of government policy requirements, is necessary for the establishment of relationships based on trust and support.

Staff trainers and the Early Childhood Development Unit should help centre managers and practitioners to capitalize on the benefits of having a charter by alerting them to the nature and variety of these benefits and ways in which they can be maximised. They should be encouraged, for example, to promote parent involvement in decision-making and to use their charter for on-going self-study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have really appreciated the support and helpfulness of the managers and committee members, staff, and parents of the early childhood centres who took part in this study. They gave large amounts of their time throughout the year of fieldwork. Their hospitality was outstanding; especially considering that many were experiencing time and workload stress due to the reforms in educational administration and the corresponding introduction of new national requirements.

The expenses incurred in this research were covered by a research contract awarded by the Ministry of Education. I am grateful to the Ministry and wish to thank in particular members of the Research and Statistics Division for their assistance.

I would like to thank the members of my advisory committee for their warm, enthusiastic, and helpful support. Special thanks to Pat Irvine of the local branch of the Ministry, Margaret Whitford (previously of the Education Review Office), and the Early Childhood Development Unit team.

My brother, Cameron Farquhar, helped to give a professional touch to the printing and formatting of this report. To Reverend Peter Marshall and the guys in the Senior Common Room at Knox College many thanks for your support.

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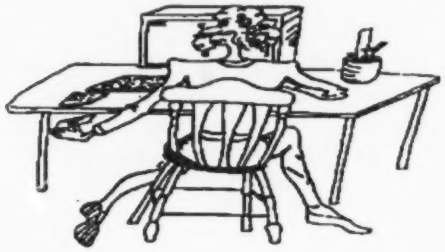

Note

This research project was featured on a video *Education Update, No.6.* produced by Learning Media, Ministry of Education, Wellington.

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INTRODUCTION TO THIS REPORT

This is a report of the responses to, and impact of, the New Zealand government's attempts to improve quality in the provision of early childhood education and care through charter development. This is one portion of a major project on "Quality in Early Childhood Centres", funded by the Ministry of Education.

Between August 1989 and 1 July 1990, the Ministry required that playcentres, kindergartens, and childcare centres seeking government funding develop a charter.

The *Early Childhood Management Handbook* (also called "*The Purple People Eater*", "*The Purple Peril*", and "*The Purple Book*" or "*Bible*" by people in the early childhood field and educational administration) provided the blueprint for charter development during this period.

The "charter" is a document which outlines the policies, philosophies, and characteristics of an early childhood centre. It is a government mechanism for promoting quality in early education and care provisions. It establishes what the government is prepared to fund. The charter document is a written contract between the Ministry of Education and the individual centre drawn up through consultation with parents and the community.

Charter development was studied in a small diverse sample of Otago playcentres, kindergartens, and childcare centres. The data collection phase for this study commenced when centres opened for the new year in January/February 1990. The cut-off point for data collection was November 1990, by which time centre charter negotiations with the Ministry should have been completed.

The foci of the study are: consultation efforts, charter writing procedures, participants' experiences of the process, participants' views on the government's requirements, and how the process of charter development affected the centres and participants.

The study involved close collaboration between the centres and the researcher. It also involved joint meetings centre staff and committee or parent representatives.

Chapter One of this report outlines the background to this project and the scope of it. In Chapter Two, the theoretical framework and the main aim and objectives of this study are presented. A time-line for the stages in the research process is also given. Procedures for sample selection and data collection are described in Chapter Two along with a

description of the main characteristics of the centres selected.

Chapter Three presents the findings on:

(a) the charter document (who the charter writers in each of the centres were, and their perceptions of the document);

(b) the consultative process (the perceived usefulness of consultation with various groups, the methods used, the problems encountered, the strategies for encouraging participation in the consultative process, and issues of contention with the non-negotiable charter principles and requirements in the Early Childhood Management Handbook);

(c) the effects on centres and participants of consultation and charter writing (the educational value of participation, the opportunity for communication between parents and centres, documentation of centre philosophies and practices, and how it affected staffing policies and programmes);

(d) experiences and perceptions of government requirements - "bureaucracy" (changing deadlines for charter negotiation, clarity of requirements for charters, costs involved in charter preparation, and the support and recognition people experienced in return for their participation);

(e) impact of charter development for early childhood services (the practical benefits of having a charter document, and the introduction of accountablity to government for funding).

In the last chapter (Four) the findings are discussed in relation to the review of the literature which had been presented in Chapter One, and the theoretical framework in Section 2.1.

The findings of this project should be of interest to researchers, as there is a dearth of recent New Zealand policy research on early education and care. It should add to the international research literature because the focus is on change in government policy to promote quality early education and accountability in ways that are not practiced in other countries.

Policy-makers and advisers should find this report relevant and timely. This report is likely to be a source of information to others, such as staff trainers for use in planning pre- and in-service programmes, and officials in their roles of either advising on, approving, or reviewing charters.

It is hoped that centre managers, committee members, staff, and parents involved in early education might dip into this report, gain ideas, and feel more confident (or comforted!) through learning of others' experiences and views.

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CHAPTER ONE
RESEARCH CONTEXT

1.1 THE FIELD OF EARLY EDUCATION

Provisions for early education and care are diverse. There are approximately 26 different services, catering for a range of parent, community and cultural needs.

The four largest services in terms of number of children attending are free kindergartens, childcare centres, playcentres, and Kohanga Reo. Pacific Island language nests, the most recent service to emerge, appear to be rapidly growing in number (Ministry of Education, 1990a).

The national (umbrella) organizations responsible for the administration of free kindergartens, playcentres and Nga Kohanga Reo are the New Zealand Free Kindergarten Union, the Playcentre Federation, and the Te Kohanga Reo National Trust, respectively. Childcare centres do not have a single management structure. However, many childcare centres and their staff are members of national advocacy and support groups such as the New Zealand Child Care Association and the Early Childhood Council.

All services aim to provide quality care and education for young children and a service to families. Differences between services are apparent, however, due to differences in emphasis on goals. For example, the emphasis on parent participation differs between services. In most kindergartens parents are encouraged but not required by the trained teachers to assist in the programme on a rostered basis. The philosophy of the playcentre movement is that the parents are the teachers. Parent involvement therefore means more than assistance. It involves a commitment to play an active part in the daily programme and centre organization. Playcentres encourage and support parents undertaking playcentre training. At most childcare centres parents are usually not required nor expected to parent-help, although some mirror kindergartens in having rostered voluntary parent-help. This is possibly due to the payment of higher fees and because childcare centres tend to cater more for parents who require assistance with child care because they are engaged in paid work outside of the home.

By law, parents do not have to enrol their children at an early childhood centre, but the majority of children attend some kind of service before formal schooling (Department of Statistics, 1990). In 1987 approximately 91.4% of all four-year-olds attended an early childhood programme; one of the highest participation rates in the world. Numbers of younger enroled children have increased dramatically from less than ten percent of all two-year olds in 1976 to approximately 48 percent in 1987.

These statistics show that the early childhood sector is important to families. Unfortunately however, the demand for places seems to continue to outstrip supply (Smith & Swain, 1988). Issues of the cost of child care fees and the responsiveness of services to community needs have also been identified as problems (Dalli, 1990).

1.2 GOVERNMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS AND INTENTIONS

Since 1986 there has been much change in the level of government involvement and the funding and structure of the early education and care. This has meant changes to the level of funding and structure of the early education sector. In 1989, Valerie Burns the Director of Early Education in the Department of Education, named this period "the quiet revolution".

The first major change was public recognition of the educational function of childcare centres. Childcare was previously regarded as a custodial service unlike kindergarten and playcentre. In 1986, responsibility for the administration of childcare was transferred from the Department of Social Welfare to the Department of Education. Childcare joined the other early childhood services under the auspices of the same department. In 1988 childcare was further affirmed as an educational service by the introduction of a three year integrated course of training for kindergarten teachers and childcare workers at colleges of education.

In early 1988 a working party on early childhood care and education was set up by Cabinet. This group, chaired by Dr. Anne Meade, made recommendations for changes to government policy. In their report, called *Education to be More*, they argued that the government should be concerned about quality assurance and should provide incentives for high quality, accessible, and affordable early childhood services in all communities.

To achieve this, the Meade Working Party recommended that the state should provide funding to the providers of early education services rather than to the parents. This would give the state the ability to introduce centre quality control mechanisms. Centres would become accountable for how and for what purposes they spent government money.

Another way for the government to influence quality was argued to be through the setting of standards. The Meade Working Party considered that licensing regulations for all services should be introduced and compliance made mandatory. The committee recommended that centres be required to have a charter, based on National Guide-lines which the government would set. The charter document, a contract between the individual centre and its community and the government, was considered important. It would be a way for the government to assure higher quality whilst still allowing for diversity in centre philosophy and practice. It would give the government greater say in the level of quality it wished to purchase. Parents and communities would be able to have a say in the quality of their centre's programme and operation.

In February 1989, the Labour government's policies for early education were released in a booklet called *Before Five*. The policy statement broadly followed the Meade Committee's recommendations. The Before Five: National Guide-lines, Charters, and Licences Working Group was formed to draw up the minimum standards for the operation of all early childhood services, to define the national guide-lines, and to formulate charter and licensing procedures. *The Early Childhood Management Handbook* was developed from this working party.

On 1 October 1989 the Department of Education was replaced by four education agencies: The Ministry of Education, The Education Review Office, The Early Childhood Development Unit, and the Special Education Service. The implementation unit for the reform of education administration instructed three services, kindergartens, playcentres and childcare centres that if they wished to receive government funding through VOTE: EDUCATION they had until 1 July 1990 to develop and negotiate a charter with the Ministry. Nga Kohanga Reo continued to be administered by the National Te Kohanga Reo Trust. Playgroups, Pacific Island language groups, and other groups who did not wish to work towards becoming chartered could receive administrative support from the Early Childhood Development Unit.

Te Kohanga Reo centres came under the Ministry of Education for chartering just before the government election in October 1990. Each Kohanga Reo centre now has to prepare its own charter and negotiate it with the Ministry.

Legislation for minimum standards was not passed until September 1990. This delay affected the Ministry's time-line for charter approval. The Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices was gazetted on 6 December 1990 and the deadline for charter approval was moved forward to 1 March 1991 (and subsequently to 30 June 1991). All centres are now required to meet minimum standards as specified by the Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations 1990. To obtain funding centres

need to have their own charter that details approved strategies to achieve a standard better than the minimum over a stated period of time. The charter is regarded as a mechanism to plan a better educational environment for children, through requiring centre staff and management to consult with parents and community during charter writing.

In short, a review of the policy documents and reports on early education and care suggests four main intentions underlying the policy initiatives of the past government:

1. To introduce and ensure accountability for government funding
   (a) enable government to stipulate the level of quality it expects in early childhood education
   (b) assure accountablity of management and staff to the parents and community of their centre;
2. To influence the quality of programmes
   (a) encourage centres to have higher ratios of qualified staff
   (b) promote professionalism in the field (e.g. the charter requirement for a management plan for staff development)
   (c) provide increased funding to chartered centres to help to assure that staff receive adequate wages/salaries and working conditions
   (d) promote quality in the physical environments of early childhood centres through non-negotiable requirements, such as that the staff-child ratio should be better than of the minimum standard
   (e) promote internal programme evaluation that is on-going and formative in nature, through the requirements for charter preparation and review;
3. To improve the provision of early education and care for families
   (a) encourage fees to be affordable for families through increased funding for chartered centres
   (b) encourage an increase in places for under-two-year-old children by providing more funding for this age group
4. To initiate change in the structure of services and in the status of the early childhood field
   (a) orchestrate greater cooperation and cohesion between the different services
   (b) devolve decision-making from the national organisation and association level to the centre level
   (c) make government funding equitable across the different services.

1.3 SPECIFICATIONS FOR CHARTER PREPARATION

As part of the process of charter development the Ministry require that management, staff, parents, and community members discuss and agree on programme goals, practices, and policies for the running of their centre. The Ministry's *Guidelines to Negotiating Early Childhood Charters* (1990b) informs its Officers that:

> ***"Evidence of consultation with parents, staff and community needs to be sighted. This could include evidence that parents, staff, community have attended meetings ... Consultation is an important step in the process and good intentions are not enough"***

The *Early Childhood Management Handbook* specifies a number of topics to be covered in consultation. These are: the learner (curriculum and programme); special needs (policies and provisions for mainstreaming); health, safety, and environment; relationships with parents and whanau (extended family); Treaty of Waitangi (the main emphasis is on ensuring bicultural practices and programme); equity (non-discriminatory policies and practices); staff development and advisory support; and land and buildings. In addition charters must include a description of the centre and its community, the programme of consultation undertaken, and the procedures envisaged for charter review.

The Ministry stress that there is no, one right way of writing a charter and that a charter should reflect the individual centre and the community in which it resides. The principles in each section of the *Early Childhood Management Handbook*, however, are stated as mandatory and management plans are expected to cover these. This caused confusion in centres, as to whether individuality in charters was possible. The Ministry's (1990c) response was:

> ***"As long as the principle of each charter statement is addressed in the individual management plan, it may be expressed differently by different centres".***

1.4 IMPLICATIONS OF THESE SPECIFICATIONS

There are several clear implications of consultation and charter development for services. The most significant effects will likely be on: programme quality as a consequence of goal clarification and documentation of philosophies, practices, and policies; communication among parents, staff and management; relationships between a centre and the community in which it resides; and relationships with officials.

1.4.1 Link Between Self-Study and Programme Quality

Self-study, in order to document goals, practices and policies, is a necessary step in the process of charter development. From their study of the effects of different pre-school curicula on child outcomes, Weikart and his associates (1978) suggest that what happens in a programme is not as important as the way in which staff implement it. There is substantial research evidence that staff values and beliefs affect their interactions and effectiveness in working with children and families (Berk, 1985; Feeney & Chun, 1985; Innes & Innes, 1984). New Zealand research supports a link between staff articulation of goals and programme evaluation and the quality of children's experiences (Meade, 1985; 1991).

Efforts to consult and document what the individual centre is about could be change-oriented (Kells, 1983). The processes and possibilities for their programmes may excite practitioners and parents. This however, would depend upon perceptions of the purpose of the charter exercise. If external forces, such as government regulation or funding, are the primary motivation, then it seems likely that the charter exercise will be less likely to be change-oriented than if it is considered to be of benefit for internal use and planning.

1.4.2 Centre-Parent Communication

Pam Kennedy, Director of the Early Childhood Development Unit explained in her opening address at a Teachers' Refresher Course (1991) that:

> ***"Relationships between families and institutions are a contemporary issue and an important arena for organisational growth and professional development".***

Most research has been carried out on parent involvement (i.e. parent-helping) and on interpersonal relationships between staff and parents. Powell (1977) calls this "horizontal interaction". There is a dearth of research on centre-parent collaboration in making decisions that affect children's experiences and outcomes; which Powell calls "vertical interaction". New Zealand research suggests that there is a need for improvement in both horizontal and vertical centre-parent relationships (Smith, 1986, Renwick, 1988).

At the horizontal level, structural differences in the nature of services seem to affect the quality of centre-parent interaction. For example, Smith (1986) found that parents formed closer relationships with staff in childcare centres than in kindergartens. A number of reasons are suggested for this: better staff/child ratios, parents drop-off and pick-up their children at different times of the day instead of all arriving

and leaving at roughly the same time, and children tend to enter childcare younger and spend more hours in their centre.

Educational philosophers point out that parents do have a right to participate in educational decision-making (Forster, 1989). Forster argues that it is at the school (centre) level where recognition of the duties and interests of parents is most pressing; firstly, as individuals for their own children, and secondly, as a group representing the interests of all children.

It seems that vertical interaction is important for parent satisfaction with the quality of care. In a United States study it was found that the more parents are allowed to have a say in the running of their centre, the higher the level of their satisfaction with their arrangement (Fuqua & Labensohn, 1986). Moreover, the researchers noted that staff respect and attention to parents suggestions on child care appeared to be related to the degree of staff communication with parents about their children's day.

In her research of communication between parents and staff in early childhood centres, Smith (1986, p. 43) suggested that:

> ***"discussion sessions between parents and staff on such substantive programme and policy issues as language development and sex-role stereotyping are necessary. Some of the sort of healthy discussion and argument that goes on in Israeli kibbutz settings about educational goals would invigorate early childhood centres in New Zealand".***

Renwick suggests that although the teachers in her study talked of partnership with parents, she believed an implicit agreement operated between teachers and parents that closer involvement of parents was not what was really wanted by either party. Powell (1977) examined attitudes towards the nature of parent-staff communication, and the findings provide relevant data on the question of whether parents want to and are expected to participate in decision-making. A majority of both parents (85%) and staff (92%) believed that there should be some discussion of centre goals and general expectations. But, considerably fewer parents (51%) and staff (64%) believed that parents should provide staff with specific suggestions and input into programme practices.

The effectiveness of centre policies and active encouragement of parents to have a say in the care of their child and the running of their centre can be mediated by the parents themselves. For example, Zigler and Turner (1982) measured the amount of time that parents actually stayed in a University demonstration centre that encouraged but did not require parents to enter the centre and participate in its programme. They found that parents spent an average of 7.4 minutes a day in the centre, with one mother spending up to 60 minutes at lunch-times with her child and 20 percent of parents who did not enter the centre in the morning or had someone else drop-off their child. Problems of lack of parent commitment and expertise for serving on centre committee's have been identified in New Zealand early childhood centres (Meade, 1981; Renwick, 1988).

Staff ability to establish relationships with parents can be affected by the amount of time

that they have to communicate with parents during the day, pre- and in-service training, and personal factors such as experience and maturity (Renwick, 1988; Smith, 1986).

1.4.3 Community Integration

Centres are located in a community of some kind, be it within the context of a public institution, shopping mall, urban housing area, or church hall in a rural area. The identification of, and consultation with, individuals and groups in the community in which centres reside should theoretically lead to greater integration of centres in their community.

Staff can provide a range of services to children and families which affect the community. They can refer children and families to other services and make use of community services and facilities themselves as part of the programme they provide.

The community can affect centre operation because children are participants in the centre as well as in the community and centre standards tend to reflect community expectations (Fein & Clarke-Stewart, 1973; Olenick, 1986).

The community can gain from involvement in educational decision-making (Bibby, 1985). For example, ethnic minority groups who try to have some impact on the education of their children, whether they are parents are not, are likely to affect outcomes that are empowering for their culture.

1.4.4 Relationships with Officials

Centres are now open to closer scrutiny from public officials (namely, the Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office). Most early education centres have had little experience of opening their doors, programmes, and administration records to officials. Centres are, in the main, small, autonomous, self-contained, and private settings where participants all know one another and a visitor is quickly noticed.

Childcare centres have experienced regular visits from Department of Education officials, Department of Health Officials and Fire Officers to check on compliance with minimum standards under the Childcare Regulations (1985). Playcentres and Kindergartens are used to internal checks by Playcentre Liaison Officers, and Kindergarten Senior Head Teachers. Although they received visits from the Department of Education these tended to be procedural rather than inspectorial in nature.

Anne Meade (1991) points out that Weikart's research on the effects of early education programme models on child development demonstrates the importance of early childhood services being 'nested' in a wider support system. This includes:

> ***"in-service training administrative support, licensing standards and personnel who support the programme (not undermine it)"***

CHAPTER TWO METHODOLOGY AND METHODS USED

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Section 1.4 suggests that linkages exist between the centre, families, individuals, groups and organizations in the community, and society. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory that relationships between different settings have an impact on child development provides a useful context to view the process and effects of charter development in this study.

Bronfenbrenner suggests that the immediate environment of the child (the microsystem) directly influences development, and the interaction of environments in which the child is contained (the mesosystem) has an indirect influence as do the environments not containing the child (the exosystem) and society, including culture, values and customs (macrosystem).

For the purpose of this study, the microsystem is the early childhood centre; containing children, parents, and staff. The relationships between centres and families are focussed upon as the mesosystem. The exosystem is the community of the centre, such as neighbours and support organizations; this is only one possible part of the exosystem. As part of the macrosystem, government policy and the role of officials will be specifically focussed upon.

Two theoretical propositions by Bronfenbrenner are pertinent in this research project:

Proposition One

> ***"The developmental potential of a setting is increased as a function of the number of supportive links existing between that setting and other settings (such as home and family). Thus the least favourable condition for development is one in which supplementary links are either nonsupportive or completely absent - when the mesosystem is weakly linked" (p. 215).***

Proposition Two

> ***"The developmental potential of a mesosystem is enhanced to the extent that there exist indirect linkages between settings that encourage the growth of mutual trust, positive orientation, goal consensus, and a balance of power responsive to action in behalf of the developing person" (p. 216)***

2.2 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this project was to document and examine the process and affect of charter development on early childhood centres who were required to prepare charters for negotiation with the Ministry by 1 July 1990 if they wished to receive funding from VOTE: EDUCATION. The centres included kindergartens, childcare centres, and playcentres.

There were three interrelated objectives of this study. These were to:

(a) examine how individual centres went about the process of consultation;
(b) identify problems and procedures in drafting charters;
(c) determine the outcomes of charter development for the centres and the people participating in the process.

2.3 VISUAL OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The study was divided into five phases. The time-line and research activities are set out below. Section 2.4. provides a more detailed description of the methods used.

PHASE I

Pre-funding January 1989 to November 1989	• Literature review • Research design discussions with other researchers and academics • Consultation about research approaches and aims with various people associated with the field • Research proposal developed

PHASE II

funding awarded December 1989	• Pamphlets sent out to centres describing the study, follow up phone calls, and visits to talk about the study with managers/ staff
November 1989 February 1990	• Fact finding meetings with the District manager of the Early Childhood Development Unit and a Ministry liaison officer • Meetings also with relevant people at association and regional management levels to further inform them about the study and what it was likely to entail for their centres • Start observing at centre charter meetings

PHASE III

February to June 1990	• Continue to observe at any centre charter-related meetings
May and June	• Attend some relevant national meetings/conventions
March	• Combined centre research meeting
June	• Combined centre research meeting • On-going discussions and consultation with E.C.D.U, the Ministry, and a meeting with E.R.O.

PHASE IV

November	• Follow-up combined centre research meeting

PHASE V

	• Data analysis and report writing • Continuing consultation (i.e. with advisory committee members, Ministry, and ECDU)

2.4 THE SAMPLE

At the time of sample selection, kindergartens, playcentres, and childcare centres were funded by the Ministry of Education. Sampling decisions were made in discussion with some regional E.C.D.U. and Ministry staff, and a childcare staff trainer. A relatively small number of centres were sampled to be able to study the process of charter development in depth. However, it was important to have a sample size that was still large enough to include a number of variations in the playcentre, kindergarten, and childcare services.

All ten centres (four kindergartens, four childcare centres, and two playcentres) were selected from the Dunedin and wider Otago region. The characteristics of these centres at the time of selection (October/November 1989) were as follows.

Three kindergartens were situated in the city and one on the outskirts of town i.e. semi-rural. The kindergartens were located in contrasting socio-economic areas. One kindergarten had a group of special needs children attending its programme. Another kindergarten had a full-daycare facility attached. One was relatively new, while another was one of the longest established in New Zealand. One kindergarten had a 30/30 roll of children (30 in the morning and another 30 in the afternoon) and the other three kindergartens had a 0/40 roll. The waiting lists for child enrolments varied considerably. One 40/40 kindergarten had three teachers because of their centre's large size of the centre premises.

One playcentre was situated in a rural township and the other was in the inner city area. The playcentres were open most morning of the five-day week. Both were located near primary schools, one had a new modified classroom building and the other shared an old school building with other groups. One playcentre employed two playcentre trained parents who worked on alternate days as supervisors. The second playcentre employed a kindergarten trained supervisor.

The four childcare centres were located in the inner city area and surrounding suburbs. They were all full-day centres but varied in the proportion of enroled full-time to casual children. One centre operated in a public institution for the institution's users and staff. Another centre operated in the rooms of a community building but was privately owned. The other two centres operated in converted family homes. One was privately owned while the other was part of a group of centres under the auspices of a community pre-school association. The centres varied from as few as six children at any one time and about fifteen children on the roll to about thirty-one children at any one time and forty-two children on the roll. Two centres had recently opened while the other centres had been operating for many years.

Note

Some distinguishing features of the centres had changed by the new year (1990) when data collection started. Moreover, some of the characteristics upon which sampling decisions were made had changed by the end of 1990 because of changes within centres.

2.5 METHODS

Several methods were used for the collection of data. Occasional meetings with a Ministry of Education Liaison Officer for early education and the local Early Childhood Development Unit team were useful for information on local and national happenings and issues. Also, some national conferences/meetings of the different early childhood service groups were attended to help to gain a national perspective on the data.

When possible, planning, consultation and charter writing at the centres was observed. Assistance was given, but only when called upon, in ways such as taking meeting minutes and providing suggestions to questions or problems raised. Notes from these meetings were hand-written, either during the meetings or shortly afterwards (if note-taking seemed to be distracting for people at the time). Approximately 28 meetings and gatherings for charter preparation were attended (e.g. charter sub-committee meetings, family-teas, staff meetings). In addition, relevant information from informal discussions, such as telephone conversations and chats with staff when visiting centres, was noted. The notes were collated into individual folders for each centre and these provided profiles of the centres and participants' experiences and feelings related to chartering.

Three combined centre meetings of management, staff, and parent representatives were organized. These were held at the University on Wednesday nights in March (when people had started to look at charter preparation), June (when people had prepared their draft charter), and November (when people could reflect back on the process).

At the first meeting, participants engaged in discussion about their experiences and feelings in working towards the meeting minimum standards, carrying out consultation, and drafting their charter. The Ministry of Education Liaison Officer for early education was invited to speak at this meeting to clarify questions and concerns about Ministry requirements. At the second meeting, a short survey covering the main issues and concerns about charters and the requirements which had been raised at the first meeting was given to participants (see Appendix A). They shared their answers and discussed ideas for coping with problems which had been raised. The final meeting took the form of a celebration evening to thank the representatives for their contribution. They were also asked for any feedback on a summary of the information which had been gathered for each centre.

At two childcare centres little charter preparation had been observed because it had been primarily carried out by the proprietors and/or some of their staff. Representatives from these two centres had not attended all the combined centre meetings. Therefore, separate interviews with the proprietor and supervisor from one centre were carried out and with the proprietor/supervisor from the second centre. For the interview with the proprietor of one centre and the proprietor/supervisor of the second centre a schedule of broad questions and topics was drawn up prior to the interviews (see Appendix B). The interviewees had access to the schedule so that they could follow it through the interview. Permission to tape-record the interviews was given by the interviewees and this enabled the interviews to take the form of a discussion with the researcher (who was not tied

to trying to record their comments by hand). The supervisor interview took the form of the researcher filling in the answers to questions on the survey sheet which the representatives from other centres had completed at the second research meeting. A director from a third childcare centre was also approached for her answers to the questions on the survey sheet because she was unable to attend the second research meeting due to sickness and no other representatives from her centre had been organized to attend.

Copies of the transcripts of the March and June research meetings and of representatives answers on the survey given out at the June meeting were posted or personally handed to representatives to check and comment upon further if they wished. All the information collected was compiled using a a computer word-processor. Key themes in the data were identified and the data were organized under the theme headings for each centre. The November research meeting provided an opportunity for representatives to read through and to check this data, before it was brought together and written up in the form of this report.

CHAPTER THREE
FINDINGS

3.1 THE CHARTER DOCUMENT

3.1.1 The Charter Writers

The people who had a major role in preparing their centres charter differed across the kindergartens, childcare centres and playcentres.

At the childcare centres, charter preparation was primarily the responsibility of the management or director, and in three centres staff also assumed major responsibility. The degree of parent involvement in charter preparation differed across the childcare centres, with comparatively little input being asked for at two of the four centres. In contrast, at the kindergartens and playcentres charter preparation was treated as a combined staff, sub-committee, or parent council responsibility.

As umbrella organizations the Dunedin Kindergarten Association and the Otago Playcentre Association approved and signed charters on behalf of their centres before submitting charters for negotiation with the Ministry. All six playcentres and kindergartens received a skeleton charter or framework from their particular Association, to which they added what was relevant for their centre.

The charter frameworks provided programme philosophy and administrative statements. This was found to be useful at each of the kindergartens and playcentres to ensure that their charter reflected what it is to be a kindergarten or a playcentre (i.e. the special character of their service). Otherwise, consultation might have had the potential to change the nature of centres:

> *"... if parents views clashed with the philosophy of playcentre, our philosophy would override that because our centre is a member of the Association" (Centre A)*

Each kindergarten sub-committee met regularly to discuss and plan their charter, using their Association's framework. Teachers provided written notes on the centre's programme. Each sub-committee took the responsibility for ultimately deciding what views from consultation were contained in their charter. The chairperson or secretary usually compiled meeting notes and drafted sections of the charter for discussion, debate, and refinement at further meetings.

At the urban playcentre a group of four parents did most of the drafting of their charter. They consulted and checked regularly with parents at parent meetings. In contrast at the rural playcentre most parents accepted responsibility for drafting with one or two others, a section of their charter. The parents presented their ideas and drafts which were discussed, altered and agreed upon, at a single meeting. The president

and secretary later compiled the parents notes, tidied up the wording, to produce their charter document.

At the childcare centres the charter writers relied more or less on the *Early Childhood Management Handbook*. Although two centres had a copy of a guide to charter writing produced by the New Zealand Childcare Association.

The community-operated childcare centre wrote its own charter even though it was under the auspices of a community association. The executive of the association did have a say, however, on the management plans that related to funding and staffing. Seven fortnightly meetings of the director, staff, and some parents were held to discuss one or two sections at a time. The one and only parent who attended the final meeting, volunteered at this meeting to take the notes from the previous meetings and compile them into the draft charter. The director checked through the draft and re-wrote parts before passing it to the executive for approval.

The proprietor of the large private childcare centre wrote a draft charter and circulated copies to staff as well as to a small group of parents who volunteered at her request to meet and provide feedback on it. She made some revisions to the draft charter based upon feedback on matters relating mainly to administration and facilities. At a Family Tea she informed parents that the charter had been completed. Parents were asked to sign a sheet to be submitted with the draft charter as evidence to the Ministry that they had been consulted and approved the draft charter, although they had not viewed it in its completed form.

The proprietor/supervisor of a small private childcare centre met with her staff on a number of occasions in the late afternoon to discuss what to write in their charter. One staff member took responsibility for writing the charter because "*she just has the knack with words*". Copies were displayed for parents to comment on and to sign if they agreed with what had been written.

The director and supervisor of the institutional-based childcare centre worked together in drafting sections of their charter. Their drafts reflected earlier consultation with parents through a survey and a parents meeting. These were presented and discused at regular staff meetings. The director put the charter document together and presented it to the staff at a staff meeting. Copies were available and displayed for parents to read and approve.

3.1.2 Perceptions About "The Charter"

The charter being a legal document was an issue raised by some representatives at the March research meeting. It was agreed by all

representatives that this was a problem. Concerns were expressed about the importance of trying to get the wording right so that their centres would not be held accountable for anything that was not intended to be stated. Yet, it was also recognized that charter statements had to be broad in wording because the principles required to be stated applied to charters of all centres. Some required charter principles particularly relating to non-sexism, biculturalism, and mainstreaming were discussed amongst the representatives as being idealistic given the nature of New Zealand society and the resources available to centres.

Across the centres there was agreement with and acceptance of the non-negotiable requirements. This was observed at meetings and noted in discussions with parents on charter committees. It was believed however, that the requirements, imposed on them from above, were restrictive in respect to allowing them to formulate a charter that was particular to their own centre. Representatives of all ten centres complained that a considerable proportion of the charter document had to be a restatement of the 'guide-lines' for charter principles and requirements contained in the *Early Childhood Management Handbook*. The charter document was not considered to be one that could provide a textually rich picture of centre beliefs, aims, and practices.

Here is a sample of comments taken from the research meetings, interviews, and observation of centre meetings, to illustrate the ways in which the 'charter' was perceived:

"We were already doing much of what was stated in the charter guide-lines. So writing the charter was more a process of documenting current practices and writing down the goals and methods of achieving these, rather than taking on board any new requirements" (Centre I)

"A lot of it is just looking at what is written in the handbook and writing something similar. We basically agree. But just can't practically apply all the principles" (Centre J)

"We are required to state that 'the staff will ensure that meal and snack times are an enjoyable occasion'. But if some kids wake up at snack time, very grumpy, is it our fault? or if they don't like what's being served?" (Centre H).

"It seems like we have to pretend to consult when so much of the charter is laid down anyway" (Centre H).

"The Ministry gave a new meaning to 'negotiate". We have to negotiate. They don't have to" (Centre C)

"What say the parents all want something in the curriculum that's not allowed? I'm not sure what the situation would be. We haven't come across this yet. Do you just bow down to the Ministry and word the charter round the corner and round the bend?" (Centre A).

"We were virtually told everything we had to do to develop and write in the charter. We were given so much information from the Association, the Ministry, and ECDU. In the end I felt I was just involved in a bureaucratic exercise" (Centre E)

"We're probably all going to have quite similar wording such as 'providing a warm and secure environment for children to be in" (Centre D)

"It's effectively imposing another set of minimum standards - at the philosophical level" (Centre H)

A member of Dunedin Kindergarten Association executive explained to a kindergarten subcommittee that statements of intention in a charter could be interpreted differently. Qualifiers on these statements were needed so that the kindergarten would not be held to them if resources and finance were lacking. For example, the words "will do" should be replaced with "will plan to do".

3.2 CONSULTATION

3.2.1 Usefulness of Consultation with Various Groups

At all of the centres consultation with parents was attempted. However, the extent to which consultation with other groups was thought to be relevant and, or attempted varied across the centres. For example, Table 1 suggests that consulting with local businesses was probably not considered to be important at most centres as only two centres indicated that they had consulted with businesses.

TABLE 1.

The reported usefulness of centre consultation with various groups about their charter's

(4 = most useful, 3 = useful, 2 = slightly useful, 1 = not useful)

Centre	PARENTS	PUBLIC	MAORI COMMUNITY	SCHOOLS	BUSINESSES
A	3	-	-	2	-
B	3	2	3	-	-
C	3	2	2	-	-
D	4	2	3	4	-
E	4	1	3	2	1
F	4	2	4	3	-
G	2	-	-	-	-
H	3	-	-	-	-
I	4	2	3	2	2
J	2	-	-	-	-

At the June research meeting, representatives from each centre were asked to discuss how fruitful they had found consultation with various groups and provide a rating for their centre on a four-point scale of "most useful" to "not useful". Table 1 shows that centre representatives consistently reported that parents were the most useful group to consult with followed by Maori advisers/groups. Consultation with people in their neighbourhood (public), primary schools and businesses, was considered to have been least useful.

At the playcentres parent consultation was found to be "useful". It was "most useful" at three kindergartens and "useful" at the fourth. Parent consultation was "most useful" at the institutional-based childcare centre, "useful" at a private childcare centre, and "slightly useful" at the community childcare centre. The supervisor at the second private childcare centre reported that "*what little input parents gave*" had been "useful".

Of the centres whose staff or charter subcommittees sought the assistance of Maori advisers or Maori people in their community their help was "most useful" at a kindergarten, "useful" at a playcentre, two kindergartens, and one childcare centre, and "slightly useful" at the fourth kindergarten.

Contact with people in the neighbourhood (i.e. public) was either "slightly useful" or "not useful" at the centres where public involvement had been sought.

Consultation with teachers and principals of primary schools was "most useful" at one kindergarten, "useful" at a second kindergarten and "slightly useful" at a third kindergarten, one childcare centre and one playcentre. Consultation with local businesses was "slightly useful" and "not useful", at a childcare centre and kindergarten, respectively.

3.2.2 Methods of Consultation

There were differences between the centres in what methods of consultation were used. A slightly greater number of ways of consulting were tried at the kindergartens and playcentres

than at the childcare centres. Table 2 shows the range of consultation approaches that were taken.

TABLE 2.

The methods of consultation used at each type of centre and the total number of centres to use them.

Method	Playcentres (n = 2)	Kindies (N = 4)	Childcare (N = 4)	TOTAL
Distribution or display of charter drafts	2	4	4	10
Centre notices/posters	2	4	3	9
Charter sub-committee	2	4	2	8
Home newsletters/notes	1	3	3	7
Parent formal meeting(s)	2	2	2	6
Parent/family social(s)	1	2	3	6
Public meeting(s)	2	2	0	4
Questionnaires	0	4	0	4
Telephone tree	2	2	0	4
Informal conversation	1	3	0	4
School communication	1	3	0	4
Sub-group parent meetings	2	1	1	4
Initial opinion survey	2	0	1	3
Staff meetings	0	0	3	3
Plunket/health nurses	1	1	0	2
Article in own institution magazine	N/A	N/A	1	1/1

Table 2 shows that at each centre copies of the draft charter were displayed or handed out to parents. This was usually for the purpose of obtaining parents signatures, as evidence to the Ministry that they had been given the opportunity to approve it.

Notices and posters were a common method for keeping parents up-to-date with the charter preparation process and informing them of any up-coming meetings. Also common to many centres was the formation of a sub-committee (or charter committee) to take responsibility for consultation and charter writing. Notes sent home with children were used at many centres as a way of making sure that all families were informed about charter preparation.

Formal parent meetings were called at two kindergartens, two childcare centres and both playcentres. However a low turn-out of parents occurred at some of these meetings (see 3.2.3). Social events were organized at these and some other centres, including family teas, fish 'n chip evenings, parent lunches, and a children's fun-day barbecue. Socials helped to encourage parents into the centre for the purpose of informing them about chartering and to communicate the need for their support. At meetings and social events, parents were asked to sign their name on attendance sheets to provide evidence of consultation for their centre.

Public meetings to discuss charters, or a particular section in charters such as the Treaty of Waitangi, were called at two kindergartens and the playcentres. Public meetings were advertised in daily and community newspapers. They were also advertised through invitations to

local schools and notices in shopping and community areas.

Questionnaires were distributed to families at each of the kindergartens. At one kindergarten, questionnaires were also distributed to households, businesses and near-by institutions. Most questionnaires covered only one or a few charter sections at a time.

A 'telephone tree' was implemented at the playcentres and two kindergartens. The purpose of this was to make contact and inform every family about the charter and/or upcoming meetings. Informal conversation with parents was cited at three kindergartens and one playcentre to have been a method of consultation. At three kindergartens and one playcentre communication for charter consultation purposes with local primary school committee's, new entrant teachers and principals was initiated.

Sub-group meetings of parents at one kindergarten, one childcare centre, and the playcentres were arranged as a more viable means of consultation than initial attempts at whole group consultation meetings and social gatherings. At the kindergarten a series of four small group meetings on the same charter topics were organized to give parents a choice of different times to attend. At one playcentre the time of day that parent meetings were held was varied to increase the likelihood that parents would be able to attend at least one charter meeting. At the second playcentre parents worked in small groups and alone on different sections of the charter, and then later presented their work to the whole group. At the childcare centre mostly the same parents (between five to seven parents) had three evening meetings together at one of the family's homes. Their brief from the centre's proprietor was to discuss and provide comments on the draft charter document she had prepared.

Staff meetings were cited as a method of consultation at three childcare centres. Formal meetings of only staff members were called for the purposes of establishing commitment to the Ministry's non-negotiable charter principles and discussing ideas for management plans.

A parents' survey was carried out at the playcentres and one childcare centre. The surveys were designed to provide initial parent feedback on topics relating to centre provisions, the children's programme, and sections of the charter that were possibly contentious issues (for example, provision for special needs children and taha Maori).

Two centres, a playcentre and a kindergarten reported that they had sent relevant charter material to the plunket nurse and public health nurse for their comment. Information about charter preparation at a childcare centre was published in its institution's magazine.

3.2.3 Problems in Undertaking Consultation

That "*some weirdo*" might come in off the street and disrupt meetings by arguing views contrary to playcentre philosophy was a concern expressed by a playcentre parent. To their relief this did not happen. It was not reported to have happened at any centre.

At all centres, the parents were usually requested more than once to attend charter meetings or to be involved in some way. This contrasted with attempts to consult with individuals and groups in the community who were usually not approached a second time if lack of interest or unwillingness to participate was shown. Consultation with parents seemed to have been regarded as much more of a priority than consultation with the community. Moreover, at four centres carrying out community consultation was considered to be problematic because their definition of community centered on 'the neighbourhood which a centre serves', and consultation with the community was therefore considered irrelevant or too difficult, because their centres drew families from many areas.

Factors that were major influences on the success of consultation methods in any one centre were:

- the suitability of the consultation method in terms of the characteristics of the families,
- centre expectations for results, and,
- how consultation was carried out.

Parent consultation proved to be more difficult than had been anticipated at all of the centres. Comments from the people engaged in charter preparation indicated that they all experienced some difficulty in getting parents to participate, or they had realized after their initial attempts that they had to lower their expectations. At one childcare centre, for example, the director and staff, feeling disillusioned with the lack of parents feedback, decided that "no comment" indicated parent consent. The low response rate to questionnaires surprised the kindergarten teachers. As one head teacher said, "*they required continual jollying along from us*".

Staff and sub-committee members perceived that some methods of consultation simply did not work. An extreme example of this was annoyance at the replies received from some parents on a kindergarten's questionnaire. The kind of feedback given by some of the parents was not what the sub-committee and teachers had expected. Some comments were received that were seen to be personal criticisms:

> *"... they thought that we didn't talk to the fathers, only the mothers. And silly comments, like we had no where to welcome them or no where for them to sit. Well we've got a sofa" (Centre C).*

At the centres where social gatherings were called (see 3.2.2), charter discussion proved to be difficult, although staff and sub-committees reported a high level of satisfaction with the turn-out they got.

Across the centres that had regular meetings the attendance rate dwindled. For example, at a childcare centre's seventh and final charter meeting only one parent out of the 30 families attended as compared with an average of five parents at the initial meetings. At another child-care centre the director decided not to call any further parent meeting after the second one also had a nil turn-out.

Various other problems in undertaking a programme of consultation were experienced. Some of these were: tired and disruptive children at a playcentre's day-time parent meetings, no

suggestions received in a kindergarten's suggestion-box, and management and staff across the centres questioned whether parents really read noticeboard notices, newsletters, etc.

Three main issues affecting consultation procedures and outcomes were:

- the physical and emotional demands of involvement in charter preparation on management, staff and parents;
- parents' time commitments (because they were also working and/or involved in other activities outside of the home), and,
- lack of parent interest, willingness, or capacity to take part.

The parents and majority of staff, directors and managers who were involved in charter preparation found it to be emotionally tiring, for example:

> *"someone else will have to cut and paste the charter and revise it next time" (Centre F),*

said a participant at a final kindergarten meeting for putting together their draft charter. The past-president of a playcentre reported that she and other parents were:

> *"short of energy and writing the charter is draining our energy" (Centre A).*

At all centres the charter had been the main organizational topic of conversation, written communication, and meetings held between January/February and May/June 1990.

Across all the centres, the problem of time as a factor restricting parents ability to be consulted or to play a more active part in charter preparation was mentioned. It appeared to be more of an issue at the childcare centres. Managers and staff reported that their parents generally did not have the time to be involved in their centre, which is why childcare parents tend to choose their service rather than another which would require parent involvement.

Parent apathy was reported by all centre representatives to be a major problem in carrying out consultation. The various reasons perceived for parents' apathy were as follows.

It was believed by all centre representatives that most parents viewed charters as *"just more government bureaucracy"*, and felt that their views and input to the process would not be of direct benefit to their children or to the centre.

There had been some media coverage of parents negative experiences on Boards of Trustees in schools in the months prior to early childhood centres embarking on their programme of consultation. This publicity was believed by most centre representatives (all kindergartens and playcentres, and one childcare centre) and by some parents who recalled their own experiences at centre meetings to have been one reason why other parents had not become involved. Moreover, centres who had parents who had been involved in some way with the preparation of a primary or secondary school charter and/or who were still on a school board of trustees for their older children reported that these parents were reluctant to have any more of their time taken up by such involvements at the centre

level. Compared to schools, early childhood centres had not received much media coverage over charter development. Centre managers and staff reported receiving surprise reactions from some parents and people they approached for consultation, that the centre should have to have a charter.

At centre meetings and in general discussions with directors, supervisors, and staff, it seemed that at nine of the ten centres the majority of parents believed that they did not have to become involved to any great extent such as attending meetings because "*someone else will do it*". Discussion at kindergarten subcommittee meetings indicated that subcommittees perceived that the majority of their parents regarded charter drafting to be their job and responsibility. At the childcare centres parents were reported to expect staff and management to do the charter because they paid fees for "*worry-free childcare*". At the urban playcentre most of the work in drafting charter statements and carrying out consultation was left to a hard-core of four parents. In contrast, at the rural playcentre charter preparation tended to be viewed by parents as a collective task.

At the March and June research meetings, kindergarten representatives mentioned that they were finding that many parents were not getting involved for the reason that their children would no longer be at kindergarten to benefit from the charter when it was completed. In addition, by the time parent's recommendations came to be implemented the changes may no longer be relevant to the needs of the new parents and children, for example: one head kindergarten teacher explained:

> ***"We hear the comment of: my children won't be here when its in place so why should I be involved?" (Centre C)".***

This may also be a contributing reason for the lack of involvement of parents who had older children at the childcare centres.

A minority of parents were reported at eight of the ten centres to believe that they were not competent or able to provide the input or support asked of them. Attempts to consult especially with Maori parents and parents from other minority groups were reported to result in frustration for both parents and the people carrying out consultation. One kindergarten head teacher, for example, reported that a Maori family responded with the following explanation when asked for help with formulating statements for the Treaty of Waitangi section:

> ***"They said we come from the North Island and we don't know very much about our culture" (Centre A).***

A reluctance amongst new parents in particular to be involved or to state their views was discussed amongst centre representatives at the research meetings to be a barrier to obtaining parent participation. For example one kindergarten teacher mentioned that it took most parents at least a couple of months to get used to the kindergarten before they were confident to join in on meetings and functions.

3.2.4 Techniques for Encouraging Participation

At only one centre, the institutional-based childcare centre, was charter writing treated as a

useful exercise in and of itself for staff professional development and programme improvement. At the other centres the main motivation was government funding. Regardless of the extent to which internal or external factors provided motivation for participants in undertaking the charter exercise, the deadline for charter negotiation meant that 'tactics' of some form or another were used at every centre to get their charters completed.

At kindergarten and playcentre meetings the possibility (or "threat") that government funding might be discontinued was frequently mentioned. An implication of this, that parents would therefore be charged fees or higher fees, was often raised. At a kindergarten meeting, for example, the president stressed that they would not continue to receive funding unless they all worked hard to produce a charter to the Ministry's satisfaction.

At all centres the shortage of time or urgency for completing the charter was used as an argument to assure that the level of involvement and commitment to the process was maintained, and at times stepped-up.

At the childcare centres the funding and deadline arguments were not openly used to encourage or secure parent participation. These issues were, however, raised as concerns at staff meetings and in staff/management discussions about the importance of keeping on task and/or encouraging others to maintain their commitment to the charter development process.

Higher response and participation rates from parents were often obtained through reminding them about meeting times or questionnaires that needed to be completed. Methods of reminding them included: telephoning, notices, and personal reminders from managers and staff at the centre.

Some centres (see 3.2.2) organized social occasions for the specific purpose of enticing parents as a group to the centre. It was not possible for in-depth charter discussion to take place at these gatherings, but they nevertheless gave sub-committee members/ managers and staff an opportunity (although it was usually brief) to "*raise the matter of the charter with as many parents as possible at one time*". (Some examples are: one kindergarten had "*... a children's fun-day barbecue with the charter dribbling around the outside*". Another kindergarten sub-committee organized a fish 'n child evening to "*... throw the charter at them by surprise*". A playcentre held a public meeting at the local hotel with supper provided because

"*... you've got to bribe people to make them come*").

Spreading and sharing the workload was an approach used at all centres (to a greater or lesser extent) to get people involved. People were more likely therefore to have tasks that they felt most competent at or comfortable with. It reduced the amount of time that was asked of any one person to give. At one childcare centre, for example, a different person took responsibility for preparing and chairing each meeting. Usually the person who took the responsibility for a meeting had a special interest in the topic to be worked on at the meeting. Management and staff were able to cite as evidence to the Ministry that people (namely parents) other than themselves had been involved with charter development because there had been the conscious involvement of others.

At the institutional-based childcare centre careful planning and clear goals explained to all staff had proven to be valuable for keeping on task, according to the director. The stages and time-line for charter preparation were approved and agreed upon at the out-set for everyone to follow. At staff meetings only part of the time was devoted to discussion and work on the charter. The director believed that this had helped them to remain enthusiastic about charter development, compared with the dread that she had noted people from the other centres in the study felt towards having 'another' charter meeting.

Representatives at the research meetings and in informal discussion with them acknowledged that many of the problems in carrying out consultation related not only to the characteristics of the parents (see 3.2.3) but were affected by how consultation had been approached in their centre. Some approaches were undoubtedly more successful than others - as determined by the response or participation rate, and the quality and quantity of feedback. The most successful methods fulfilled one or more of the following criteria. They:

1. were realistic in terms of the time that people could give (e.g. parents were more likely to complete a questionnaire in their own time than attend a centre meeting);

2. took into account the needs of the people whose involvement was wanted (e.g. fewer parents attended day-time meetings unless meetings were held during session hours or children were allowed to attend);

3. were appropriate to the group or individuals being consulted (e.g. some parents had obvious difficulty in understanding some expressions and professional jargon used in questionnaires, in the Early Childhood Management Handbook, and correspondence from the Ministry);

4. were meaningful because the relevance or importance of contributing was clear.

Below is a summary of the approaches to consultation found to have been successful by individual centres (in comparison to other methods tried, see Sections 3.2.2 and 3.3.3).

A. Sub-group Meetings of Parents

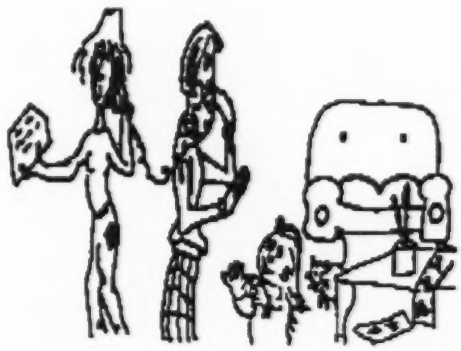
Calling a number of sub-group meetings for parents to select what would suit them best to attend or organizing for a small proportion of the total number of parents to meet, was found to work better than trying to get as many parents as possible along to a single meeting.

At one playcentre, meetings were held at different times of day to increase the likelihood that parents would make it to a meeting. At the second playcentre individual parents got together to work on different sections of the charter. This was believed to save the time of all parents in not having to work on each section as a group. At a kindergarten, the attendance at whole group meetings so disappointed the sub-committee that they decided to hold a parent consultation meeting with the same agenda at four different times of day. This was aimed at reducing the likelihood that parents would not be able to attend because they had something else on at the same time. The attendance rate over the repeated meetings proved to be high (47 out of 90 families, or 52%) for the centre.

At a private childcare centre the proprietor believed that few parents would welcome involvement with the charter. This was confirmed when she proposed at a family tea that they form a temporary committee for this purpose. Only a small number volunteered. In comparison to the level of parent involvement achieved at another private childcare centre whose proprietor attempted no further approaches after experiencing a nil turnout at two meetings, this approach of getting those parents who had some interest together appears to have been worthwhile to attempt.

B. Individual Approaches

A telephone tree, whereby individual families were phoned by management/committee members was found to result in higher turn-outs of parents at meetings and provided a method for gaining opinions and feed-back. A disadvantage of this approach was, however, experienced at one playcentre. Parents often wanted to talk about personal and other non-related matters which took up the time of those doing the phoning.



At a childcare centre the staff mentioned a planned parents meeting to parents of every family. This approach was believed by the director to have been the main reason for achieving a high representation (approximately 75%) of families at it.

C. Here and Now Approach

A childcare centre director believed that a high parent response rate to a survey was achieved because all parents were approached when entering the centre and asked to take ten minutes out to complete the survey before leaving. This

personal, here and now approach meant that the parents were less likely to refuse or not complete the survey than if left to do it in their own time.

D. Survey of General Opinion

At one childcare centre a survey of parents opinions was reported by the director to have elicited useful information on what they liked about the programme and what they wanted from the centre. The results were compiled and summarized in terms of the different charter principles required to be stated in charters. Copies of this were given to parents as a starting document for discussion and further consultation.

E. Combined Staff/Parent Meetings

Combined staff/parent meetings initially appeared to work well at one childcare centre and two kindergartens that relied on these as their main approach to consultation. However, from the initial one or two meetings onwards, numbers of participants started to drop. Subcommittees and staff/ management reported decreasing satisfaction with this as a method of consultation.

F. Public Meeting at a Public Place

At one playcentre few people attended a public meeting, so their next public meeting was organized to be held at the local tavern. The tavern is a regular meeting place for many in the rural township. The supervisor reported that the meeting served to increase public awareness of the playcentre and to demonstrate to the community that everyone was welcome to have a say in it. After the meeting many of the people stayed on for a few more drinks, or a game of darts, etc.

3.2.5 Contentious Issues

> ***"... in most areas we had little choice in the actual adoption of concepts such as equity or Treaty of Waitangi. If we want the new funding we must toe the party line" (Centre A).***

At the March research meeting there was discussion on the irony of having to state certain principles in the charters whilst also meeting a requirement to reflect parent and community views through a programme of consultation. Discussion concluded on the note that consultation would in the end make little difference to charter content. However, consultation with parents, families, and the wider community was believed to be useful for finding out acceptable ways for implementing charter requirements and people's views could be incorporated into the management plans.

Discussion at the research meetings and during the proprietor/supervisor interviews indicated that there were two contentious sections in the charter guide-lines of the *Early Childhood Management Handbook.* These were:

1. *Treaty of Waitangi*

Principle:

It is the right of each and every child to be enriched in an environment which acknowledges and incorporates the dual heritage of the Treaty partners.

Requirements:

- There will be acceptance and acknowledgement of Maori values, customs and practices.

- Management should ensure that there are opportunities available for staff, parents/whanau and themselves to participate in courses on cross-cultural understanding, including opportunities to extend and strengthen their knowledge and understanding of the values and language of the Tangata Whenua.

2. *Special Needs*

Principle:

Children with special needs and their families are entitled to have their individual and special needs catered for in the centre they attend.

Requirements:

- Provision is to be made for children with special needs.
- The programme will be designed to maximise the strengths of children with special needs.
- Individual children's programmes will include specific objectives based on careful assessment and monitoring of specific skills and activities.
- To enable them to work effectively with children with special needs and their parents, staff will seek guidance and information from specialist services and others associated with the children and family.
- Staff will keep records of their observations, planning and evaluations of children with special needs.
- Children with special needs will be taught in the same setting as other children.
- There will be an effective and efficient transition procedure for children with special needs as they move from one centre to another.

The principle of 'Equity' was also debated in many centres but it was not a contentious issue. Many parents and staff were not sure of the meaning of the concept and many confused it with the 'Treaty of Waitangi' principle. Disagreement about its importance was not observed when the concept was clarified during discussion at meetings, and the wording of these sections of the charter guide-lines was simplified in communications with parents.

At the playcentres, the requirements for provision for special needs children and recognition of the Treaty of Waitangi were not contentious. A special needs child was already attending one playcentre, the other playcentre was establishing links with local Maori elders and Kohanga Reo children. The parents and supervisors of both playcentres did not debate the requirements under these two principles. Likewise, at one kindergarten and one childcare centre it was recognized at the start of the charter development process that the principles could not be disputed and debate on them would only be a waste of time.

The requirements for provision of special needs children and recognition of the Treaty of Waitangi were debated in two kindergartens. At one kindergarten some parents felt that children with special needs should not be accepted until support and education networks were in place to ensure adequate care and to assure that their own children did not miss out on teacher attention.

The kindergarten's draft charter stated that children with special needs would only be accepted providing resources were available. Some parents were reluctant for te reo Maori to be incorporated into the programme. Parents choice of whether or not their children should learn some Maori was taken into account in drafting this section of the charter.

At a third kindergarten the teachers considered that their special needs group was better than full mainstreaming. They believed they could not cope with the individual needs of all special needs children within the usual programme. Some special needs children needed more support than others and the teachers felt that they did not have the training to cope with the range of individual requirements of special needs children. Moreover they reported that teacher/child ratios were not adequate to permit time for much one-on-one teaching and care. Some parents at this kindergarten disputed an emphasis on Maori in the charter and argued that other minority cultures should be equally emphasised. The rationale was that more children from other minority ethnic groups attended the kindergarten and that the cultures of these children were being ignored. Disapproval of an emphasis on biculturalism rather than multiculturalism was not reflected in the kindergarten's draft charter because the sub-committee decided that the parents' view clashed with the Ministry's emphasis on the Treaty of Waitangi principle.

At a fourth kindergarten some annoyance amongst parents was expressed about the Treaty of Waitangi section in the Handbook. According to the head teacher, some parents, including Maori parents, did not want the teachers to "*rush in*" and start teaching Maori language and values to the children just to fulfil the charter requirements. They wanted Maori to be "*gently incorporated into the programme over an extended period of time*".

At two childcare centres the enrolment of special needs children was an issue. At both centres, the director/ supervisor and staff expressed the need for more staff, training, and facilities to cope with special needs children. One centre already had a special needs child enroled but staff were reluctant to accept further special needs children until they had the resources and ability to do so. At the other centre, the requirement for provision for special needs children was disagreed with. The draft charter of this centre stated that special needs children would only be accepted where ancillary care was available. The director explained that the centre could not afford to pay the wages for staff to give the kind of one-on-one attention that a special needs child should be given. At a fourth childcare centre the Treaty of Waitangi principle and requirements were supported but not considered to be realistic in practice (for example, the "*staff have difficulty letting go of their pakeha values*", such as remembering not to sit on tables). Because no Maori children were enroled at the centre, the incorporation of Maori language, culture and values, was not believed to be necessary.

3.3 EFFECTS ON CENTRES AND PARTICIPANTS

3.3.1 A Learning Experience

> *"In a way, charters were a learning experience for everyone" (Supervisor, playcentre B)*

Helping to formulate charter statements and providing feedback was informative for all parents, staff, and management who were involved. For example, a head teacher reported that:

> *"a parent wrote in to say that she hadn't realised those procedures existed and so that's a really positive side of writing the charter" (Centre D).*

Some parents and staff (especially new staff) learnt and gained a greater understanding of their centre's philosophy and practices. Managers and staff learnt more about parent and community views. They also engaged in some questioning of their own views and practices as a consequence of feedback.

Parent questionnaires and surveys were useful for indicating how parents and community members viewed the centres, their programmes, and what they needed more information about. Some parent criticisms indicated a need to provide educational material or to plan parent education seminars. At one kindergarten, for example, a parent had written that sand clogged up her washing machine and the cost for repairs was $30.00. The parent questioned whether there was any need for a sand-pit at the kindergarten! - much to the teachers' amusement. A parent at another kindergarten was not pleased with what her child was learning because the teachers did not sit down and show the children how to make things. At a third kindergarten some parents made comments that were obviously not correct - such as the need to have trees when there were trees.

At the playcentres, parent criticisms were brought up at Parent Council, "*discussed, and dealt with as positively as possible*". This was done for the benefit of the complainants and the information of other parents.

The exercise of charter writing was of educational value to the participants who sought clarifications of concepts used in the *Early Childhood Management Handbook.* For example, the distinction between "programme" and "curriculum" was debated at one childcare centre charter meeting. Other sources (including books, friends, and resource people) were consulted for clarification of what was meant by the requirements for equal employment practices, recognizing the Maori right to self-determination, and mainstreaming of special needs children. A common conceptual confusion and cause of misunderstandings were the meanings of "equity" and "biculturalism". At least some parents at every centre had mentioned or questioned how it was possible to be fair to all cultures when Maori and not other minority group cultures and languages were incorporated into the programme; or when the language and culture of some children was not taught while Maori had to be regardless of whether any Maori children were enroled.

3.3.2 Centre-Parent Communication

The exercise of developing a charter opened up or increased opportunities for communication between centres and parents. At all the centres, positive feedback, when this was given, was affirming for staff who usually received little supportive feedback from parents.

At the playcentres, communication amongst parents was enhanced through the opportunity to air any criticisms or comments within the context of charter consultation. Parents who participated in the process came to understand more about the running of their centre and the roles and responsibilities of the supervisors.

At the childcare centres, the requirement to consult was believed to have led to some improvements in three-way communication between managers, staff and parents. Managers checked with staff in drafting their charter document. This brought various staff concerns to light such as the need to be given training and support if they were to be expected to care for special needs children. Managers and staff communicated more with parents about centre practices and policies. Consultation enabled parents to ask questions without feeling that they were interfering or being too nosey.

At one kindergarten questionnaires which parents could reply to anonymously were believed by the head teacher to have negatively affected parent-teacher relationships. Some feedback was described by the head teacher as "*hurtful*" and showed parents "*ignorance*" of the programme and what the teachers' role was. The teachers and sub-committee members decided that on future questionnaires, parents would be asked to provide their names.

A theme that often arose during consultation was that improved communication would probably help to solve any concerns and possible misunderstandings parents expressed. At two childcare centres, management and staff received a strong message from parents that they welcomed and wanted more centre-home communication. At one of the two centres, a home-report sheet was consequently introduced for parents to fill out each day. Although the centre seems to be having some difficulty in getting parents to complete the home-report, according to the director parents are generally appreciative of the information on children's centre activities, behaviour, time slept, etc.

The kindergarten teachers found that consultation tended to benefit the parents rather than actually feeding into the writing of their charter. A few teachers expressed surprise that parents had concerns about their programmes. As a result of feedback some changes were made that teachers might not have considered according to their professional views, or would have thought of doing (for example, at one kindergarten, the results of consultation indicated that the majority opinion was that teachers did not need to home-visit children and families. Now the teachers only do home visits at the parents request or if they want to follow-up on a problem with a particular child. In response to a request for a formal mat-time for all children at the end of sessions the teachers negotiated to provide only a story-time which children could choose to participate in).

3.3.3 Documentation of Beliefs and Practices

Across the centres charter development served the purpose of clarification and documentation of practices and philosophies; in accordance though, with the charter principles specified in the Early Childhood Management Handbook. This was the first time that such documentation had been undertaken.

Kindergarten teachers provided their committees with philosophy and practice statements to use as a basis for consultation. Childcare managers/directors and/or staff appeared to have little difficulty in formulating statements of practice; and often these were not based on the outcomes of consultation. This could be due to their previous experience of writing programme statements for licensing under the old regulations. Playcentre participants had well-articulated philosophies of their movement to base examination and documentation of their own practices and beliefs on.

3.3.4 Staffing

At one childcare centre and two kindergartens charter requirements had an immediate impact on staffing policies. Parents are now required to take turns at parent-helping to help make up at least the minimum quality staff-child ratios at the two kindergartens with a 40/40 roll of children and two teachers. A head teacher gave the following description of the process of instituting compulsory parent-helping at her kindergarten:

> ***"We asked whether they would like to parent-help, stating that they had to take it seriously and they had to find their own replacements if they couldn't come. Otherwise we could reduce our rolls. But if we did we wouldn't be eligible for a third teacher later and would still have the same overheads with our huge building. We also gave them a user-pays option, which wouldn't work because it would be too expensive. The only way to go has been for us to take the parent-help option. It's a compromise with the requirement for a higher adult-child ratio and our professional commitment to having only trained staff" (Centre D).***

At kindergarten association meetings, sub-committee meetings and research meetings, resistance to calling on untrained parent assistance was strongly expressed by all teachers. The issue consumed a relatively large proportion of discussion time. This was because of the difficulty of wording the staffing section in such a way as to state that they had quality adult-child ratios, yet they could not be held to having parent assistance when more teaching staff were available through the government's implementation of a staffing scheme.

At the community childcare centre, the director now has a policy of employing only qualified staff so that overtime staffing should fully meet charter standards of high quality. Under the minimum standards, a qualified person needs to be present on the premises at all times:

> ***"which can be a bit hard on the qualified staff, particularly if the staff member on closing happens to be sick***

then it may be left to the staff member who opened-up to stay for the full 10 hours because other untrained staff can't be left" (Director, Centre G).

The director, however, believes that some unqualified staff can be good with children and enjoy doing some of the tasks that qualified people tend not to like. A position for a qualified worker was advertised but only three replies were received. A shortage of qualified staff to select from could mean that the centre may "*miss out on someone who was as good as or better than the ones that are qualified*".

3.3.5 Programme

Charter development does not appear to have substantially affected programme quality. Representatives at the research meetings discussed the effects of chartering on their programmes. The general conclusion was that charters had not served to "*stimulate any great debate or re-thinking*" of their programmes because there was "*little room (was left) for individuality to be expressed*".

There have, however, been some slight but obvious changes made to programmes as a consequence of participants working their way through the *Early Childhood Management Handbook* charter guide-lines. The most obvious change has been a movement towards some te reo Maori and tikanga Maori. Consultation and discussion on the requirements in the Treaty of Waitangi section appears to have resulted in a growing acceptance of biculturalism in all centres (for example, Maori posters on walls and Maori language by staff in their interactions with the children). Two centres now have established links with the whanau of a Kohanga Reo in their community.

3.4 GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRACY?

3.4.1 Changing Deadlines

Subcommittees, staff and management at the ten centres experienced pressure from the Ministry to move quickly towards compliance with minimum standards and develop a charter, even though the charter requirements had not been gazetted and made a legal requirement. At the March research meeting the regional Ministry Liaison Officer for Early Education urged centres to ensure that their charter was in with the Ministry before the 1 July deadline. She explained that charters should be submitted by May to allow time for travel to centres and to carry out face-to-face negotiation.

The kindergartens and playcentres were required by their associations to have their charters completed before the Ministry's deadline (for example, the Dunedin Kindergarten Association asked kindergartens to have charters in with them by 30 April. The D.K.A. aimed to start negotiations with the Ministry from 7 May).

Most centres had not begun to carry out consultation and charter preparation until the new year (1990). Two of the four childcare centres had made initial steps to start consultation with parents in November/December 1989. Part of the reason why charter preparation had not been started as soon as the government's announcement of this requirement was like the children's story of the 'elves and the shoemaker' - the task seemed too much and too complex. There was the hope that it wouldn't have to be done; that they wouldn't, when it came to the crunch (deadline), be required to charter after all.

The main reason for initial inaction on charter preparation in the playcentres and kindergartens in particular, was that their first priority was to clarify and work towards compliance with the proposed new minimum standards. As one playcentre president stated,

> ***"We are bogged down with minimum standards as well. It's all too much to do at the same time".***

The Ministry required all centres to met minimum standards and this was necessary before charter negotiations could take place. (As late as May 1990 there was still considerable politicking by people in the early childhood field against some of the proposed new minimum standards). Some changes in the facilities and physical environment of the kindergartens and playcentres were put on hold due to cost and until centres were sure that the changes had to be made. In May, the Minister of Education announced some changes and relaxation of the proposed new minimum standards. By this time centres were rushed to achieve full compliance with minimum standards, not to mention to finish their charters.

Kindergartens and playcentres were dependent upon receiving final directions from their associations before charters could be written. In these centres, many felt they were "fumbling in the dark" because they were not sure if they were carrying out the right procedures and drafting acceptable charter statements. But when clear directions and a charter skeleton had been received from their associations "*it all fell into place*". However, at all the kindergartens and playcentres it was felt that they could have

received directives much earlier in the process, to reduce the stress of not being sure what to do and if what they were doing and writing was acceptable to their Kindergarten Association or Playcentre Association.

Across all ten centres the short time-frame for consultation and charter writing was considered to be counter-productive to the intentions behind this government policy. Charters just had to be written the best they could:

> ***"It has all been too hasty and we can't get it right this time" (Centre F).***

> ***"The usefulness of writing a charter in the Ministry's terms of it involving parents has probably been lost in our centre because we haven't yet got much input from them" (Centre J)***

Even at the institutional-based childcare centre where consultation and planning for charter writing was started soon after the announcement in October 1989, the director was not entirely happy with the centre's charter and could see some improvements that would have been made had they had more time.

At a kindergarten subcommittee meeting in April an executive member of the Dunedin Kindergarten Association explained that the charter requirements were considered to be only a draft by the Ministry, although centres did have to act on these.

Most centre representatives were annoyed with the concentrated and 'undue' pressure placed on them to prepare a charter for negotiation by 1st July, especially since the legislation for this had yet to be passed. Feelings of being let down, anger, and powerlessness were reported. They had worked hard, received no feedback, and nothing happened in the way that they had believed it would. As one head kindergarten teacher complained:

> ***"I feel it's all been rather an anti-climax. We rushed with our charter and then what happens? The Ministry hasn't even looked at it. They put the pressure on us and it's turned out to be needless" (Centre F)***

With the deadline shifted to 1 March 1991 (and now 30th June) an issue of charters becoming outdated before negotiation, was brought up at the June and November research meetings. A problem is that many parents who were consulted no longer have children enroled. Moreover, there seems to be a problem of some charter statements no longer being accurate because of changes in programmes, staffing, and child and family needs. Two childcare centres are having their licenses changed to enable them to cater for more under two-year-old children, as funding is greater for this age group.

3.4.2 Clarity of Requirements

Centres received some conflicting, and at times difficult to understand, instructions from the central education agencies, health departments, and their own associations and representative organizations. This was a "sore point" amongst people at all ten centres and was a "loud" point of discussion at the research meetings. The requirements and processes were being developed and refined by the new Ministry of Education at the same time as centres were asked to act on them. A kindergarten parent reported that this was "a *terrible waste of our energy*". Requirements for chartering were open to interpretation and advice was being given along the lines of "*We think you will have to...*", or "*Although we said ... you now have to ...*".

To illustrate this problem of lack of clarity on what was required, the experience of people at one kindergarten was as follows:

A sub-committee member explained how they "*got into desperation because they didn't know where they going*". They felt that more time was needed to clarify and understand concepts that were unfamiliar to teachers and parents, such as what was meant by showing recognition of the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. They expressed frustration with the confusing directions and differing emphasis on what they should do and how they should go about doing it from the Ministry and the Early Childhood Development Unit. They also believed that policy-makers, administrators and advisers should have got together and clarified and agreed upon all requirements. In particular, they felt that the Ministry and the ECDU should have developed similar and consistent interpretations of what was contained in the *Early Childhood Management Handbook* and the procedures to be followed for developing a charter.

3.4.3 Costs of Charter Preparation

A. Personal Costs

Most participants at nine of the ten centres did not appear to enjoy their involvement or the challenge of it. Comments such as "*I'm sick of the whole topic of the charter*" were often heard at meetings especially towards the end of the process. For example, at the last meeting of a kindergarten charter sub-committee, participants agreed with the feelings expressed by one parent that it had been "*very tiring work*" and that no one on the present charter committee should "*have to look at it or do anything more on it again*". At the tenth centre, the institutional-based childcare centre, no negative emotional effects of charter development were apparent. This centre had a director who had managerial

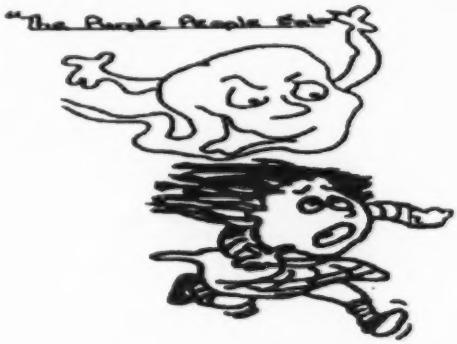
skills and whose job description meant that she co-ordinated charter preparation as part of her job, mostly during working hours.

Participants spent copious hours carrying out consultation and drafting their centre's charter over a relatively short period of time (three to six months depending upon when preparation started). They encountered considerable work: reading, understanding, and communicating with others what the requirements for writing a charter were; attending Association level meetings and ECDU in-service courses related to charters; carrying out a programme of consultation; attending and/or preparing for centre meetings; and assisting with or drafting their charter.

The action of one playcentre parent described below was atypical of most people who made no complaints at a public level about the physical and emotional costs of charter preparation. The feelings she expressed in making her complaint were however typical of what most people were feeling (according to their comments at the research meetings, centre meetings, and in individual discussions).

> ***The parent wrote a letter to the Minister of Education expressing concern about the time-frame for chartering and the effects it was having on her and other families. She said that "her house was a mess" because it was necessary to give more time than she had to help with her playcentre's charter. She explained that parents already gave large amounts of their time to the operation of the centre, through attending monthly Parent Council meetings and parent helping.***

Some participants were attending an average of two meetings a week over this period. The investment of time into charter development, obviously had emotional affects on participants (see example of a playcentre parents letter to the Minister, above); especially considering that representatives at the research meetings reported that they had attended as many as four meetings in one week, not inclusive of an ECDU course on charter writing.



The process of charter development took more time in centres where a greater number of people were involved and more approaches to consultation were tried. This was evidenced in a greater frequency and duration of staff, parent, and charter sub-committee meetings. At the private childcare centres where fewer people tended to be directly involved in charter planning and writing, less time overall was spent than at the centres where more people were involved in the process.

B. Programme Disruption

At the playcentres, parent education and children's activities were affected by the time that parents and supervisors invested in charter

preparation. For example, some supervisor and parent comments were:

> ***"I'll be so glad when July comes and we can get back to what we are here for - the children" (Centre B);***
>
> ***"Parent education programmes are on hold at the moment because of the rush to get charters done" (Centre A).***

Disruptions to kindergarten and childcare centre programmes were not reported and were not observed. Programmes continued to run as usual. This seemed to have been because not all teachers, staff, and parents were involved or played a significant role in the carrying out of consultation and organizing meetings. Whereas at the playcentres all parents were members of their Parents Council and played a more or less direct part in charter development on top of their usual centre commitments.

C. Administration Upheaval

Charter development resulted in some upheaval in centre administration. Additional paperwork was created for managers and staff (for example, correspondence from the Ministry, official forms to complete, consultation materials to prepare, and charter drafting). The normal management/committee meetings were affected, as was the ability of most managers/directors to focus on their usual tasks. Centres really needed to have at least a part-time, if not a full-time, secretary or charter development co-ordinator.

The charter was at times the main topic of discussion at management (administration) meetings. Sometimes the usual meetings were cancelled and replaced by charter meetings, because to have both during the same week or fortnight was felt to be asking too much of parent and/or staff time. At the community childcare centre the usual management meetings were totally replaced by charter meetings. The most urgent management matters were dealt with (if at all), in a brief and hurried way, at the end of charter meetings.

D. Financial Costs

Charter development proved financially costly for participants. A bone of contention, raised with a Ministry Liaison Officer by some people at the March research meeting, was that unlike school trustees they did not receive payment or reimbursement of travel expenses from the government.

Consultation and charter production was an expensive undertaking in terms of: the unpaid time it took, the time that could have been used performing other centre related or personal tasks, and the expense consultation incurred. The most significant expense for all centres was for photocopying and printing (for example, questionnaires, letters to people and groups in the community, notes for children to take to their families, and copies of the minutes of meetings). During centre discussions about possible methods of consultation and feedback, the financial implications were usually raised. Some examples of ways used to minimize costs were:

- a kindergarten sub-committee organized a choice of meetings at different times of day for parents to indicate which one they would attend. This reduced the number of draft charter photocopies that were needed. Had a single meeting been held there was potential for all families to be represented necessitating the photocopying of individual copies for all.
- at a playcentre parents council meeting the president explained that to prevent a paper shuffle between parents in drafting and gaining consensus on charter statements and to save copying off a draft charter for every family, they would discuss and agree that night on the charter statements prepared by individual parents and presented on overhead transparencies.

3.4.4 Support and Recognition

Discussions with people from the different centres indicated that there was an overall feeling that their efforts were not appreciated or recognized outside of their centres. The short time-frame for preparation combined with the lack of administrative and advisory support especially during the first few months seemed to have caused some unnecessary panic and stress. A head kindergarten teacher summed this finding up with her thought that:

> *"Looking back on it, it was a relatively simple exercise. If it was taken slower and more organized" (Centre E)*

At the June research meeting a few centre representatives suggested that the Ministry and Early Childhood Development Unit could have provided more "*pats on the back*" and guidance to reduce stress and uncertainty about whether what they were doing, was right. As one playcentre parent at the research meeting explained:

> *"I feel that we've been working hard. We could have done with something in the beginning to help us to be confident, to know that we're doing the right thing and that we, the Ministry and the ECDU are working together. The implicit message had been 'you do or else'... there are feelings involved. I don't think we've been trodden on gently" (Centre A).*

3.5 THE IMPACT OF BECOMING CHARTERED

3.5.1 Practical Uses

At the time of charter preparation people just wanted to *"get the charter written and handed into the Ministry"*. Charters were considered to be funding applications. At the June and November research meetings discussion indicated that the charter document had come to be viewed as potentially useful in a number of other ways, as a:

- reference document,
- resource document, and
- tool for self evaluation.

As a resource document the charter could be useful for parents, staff, and people associated with their centres to refer to for information on programme philosophy and practice. This could help for greater continuity of centre philosophies and practices when new staff are appointed and when changes occur in the membership of committees and parent councils:

> ***"Sometimes things get lost with changes in people and supervisors. We forget what has been done" (Centre B).***

Charters could be useful as a written support document for management and staff. Charters could help solve philosophical disputes amongst parents and supervisors (for example, over whether a child with a special need should be accepted). As one playcentre supervisor mentioned:

> ***"the charter is the bottom line and a legal requirement" (Centre A).***

One kindergarten's teachers have since used their charter to instruct a parent who argued with them that she should be able to parent-help every day.

One playcentre Parents' Council intends to look at sections of their charter at their monthly meetings. This will involve parents in an on-going examination of centre philosophy and practice. It is also perceived by the president to be important for reviewing areas of the programme before problems get a chance to occur.

3.5.2 Accountability

There is now greater consciousness amongst parents, staff and managers of regulations and the government's ability to control and monitor centre administration and programme. Charters have become the code of operation for which

staff and management are accountable to fulfil. As one director explained:

> ***"It's made us accountable. We live with the expectation that one day ERO will walk in the door and we better be doing what we state we are doing" (Centre I).***

Across the centres managers and staff have realized that the Ministry and the Education Review Office could have difficulty in determining that they are not doing what they say they are doing (for example, at a kindergarten committee meeting it was mentioned that the tea-towel could be hidden away and the dishes left to drip dry instead of being hand-dried whenever an official called in).

Apart from either opening or strengthening the channels of communication between staff, parents, and management (see 3.3.2) developing a charter document does not appear to have resulted in greater actual accountability to parents at each of the centres.

One reason seems to be that the charter development process has not affected the relationships that existed between managers, staff and parents, in terms of the kinds of decisions that each group were involved in or had input into making (see 3.1.1 and 3.2.5).

Another reason appears to be that parents may not want, or demand greater accountability of their centre (for example, at a meeting of childcare parents concern was expressed about how the proprietor might be spending (or profiteering) from the increase in government funding. A parent suggested that they should ask for details of income and expenditure. It was agreed after much discussion, however, that they had no right to ask the proprietor; they choose to use the centre and the proprietor was under no obligation to provide such information).

A third reason may be a belief that they do not have the knowledge or status in order to give critical appraisals of management and staff practices and centre quality. Comments from parents recorded at consultation and charter sub-committee meetings were often along the lines of *"well, you teachers' know best"*, *"surely its not up to us say"*, and *"we'll leave it to you to write up what you do"*.

CHAPTER FOUR
DISCUSSION

Almost everyone agrees that the concept of a charter for early childhood centres is a good one. While the process of charter development was fraught with difficulties, there were some very positive outcomes.

Centres now have their own written resource material for purposes such as induction of new staff. Charters are a valuable reference document for staff, parents, community members, and officials to check on centre philosophy, practices, and policies. Managers and staff may use their charters to engage in an on-going review of practices and polices.

Charter development has led to practitioners becoming more adept at articulating their beliefs and practices, making them more accountable for the quality they provide. This was a central intention in the recommendations of the Meade Working Party (1988).

The exercise of charter development was a mechanism for engaging people in self-study; and research on evaluation methodology suggests that this is an important and effective way for assuring and promoting quality in educational programmes. However, it should be noted that the effectiveness of self-study can depend upon what is considered to be the primary motivation for engaging in it (Kells, 1983). In this case, the primary motivation was to get government funding rather than staff development and programme improvement.

Parents' perceptions of their ability to participate in developing their centre's charter was an issue. Some parents seem to have felt that they didn't know enough about their centres, or about early education to participate (Meade, 1981; Renwick, 1988). However, through various approaches to consultation some parents did indeed express their views. This was positive for the parents, who found that their views were accepted and listened to, and for the managers and staff, who were alerted to parents' thoughts and understandings. One outcome of this may well be higher levels of parent satisfaction with their centre (Fuqua & Labenshon, 1986).

In terms of the effects on centre-family relationships, the requirement to consult led to some enhancement of horizontal interaction (i.e. sharing of information about the programme and children). It also informed managers and staff that parents welcomed more communication. Vertical centre-home interaction (i.e. parent involvement in decision-making and input into the running of the programme) was enhanced in centres where there was already some established avenue for parents to participate at this level.

The nature of centre - family relationships at the vertical level of communication was not changed by charter development in centres that did not have parent representation on committees or parent committees. In centres where conscious attempts at improving horizontal communication were being made (in particular, the institutional-based childcare centre) the extent of parent input at the decision-making level was enhanced.

The consultative process worked best in centres where there was a commitment to establishing and maintaining good centre - parent relationships. Where the commitment to such relationships was high, considerable emphasis seemed to have been placed on securing parent involvement and input into charter development (and also input from the local community). One example was the rural playcentre which tried an ingenious (and successful!) technique of holding a consultation meeting in their local pub.

There were positive effects on the relationship between the microsystem and the exosystem. These included a strengthening of relationships by kindergartens and playcentres with their associations, a greater awareness by kindergarten teachers of their professional status, and a heightened understanding by playcentres, kindergartens, and childcare centres of their individual philosophies and roles within their communities.

Perhaps one of the most positive effects of the process was a strengthening of commitment to provide quality early education services, and a greater awareness of the importance of encouraging parents to help achieve this.

The consultative process gave people who enjoy communicating and working with others an opportunity to have lots of practice. The introduction of the new requirements inspired many to think about, discuss and defend the special characteristics of their service (for example, at association meetings, meetings with Ministry liaison officers, meetings of their national organizations, and through letters to the Editor of the local newspaper).

Charter development was, however, often a painful process for people in the centres. There was much confusion with the creation of the new public education agencies, and uncertainty as to what the new macro-system rules were (for example, minimum standards and chartering). People were being rapidly moved from the security of knowing exactly what had to be done and what the procedures were for operating their services, to a situation where change confused everybody - including government officials.

Although not formally studied in this project, government officials involved in implementing policy and in advising and helping centres were likewise often under much strain. This was exacerbated by the confusion amongst most centre people as to what the roles of the different types of officials were. The Ministry Liaison Officers often were credited with being directly responsible for the problems experienced in charter development, when these really resulted from problems arising out of national decisions or within the Ministry of Education.

One source of concern was the extent to which parents were involved during the consultative process. As long as a few hard-working parents

were involved, was this sufficient? Managers and staff anguished over the problem of whether they could make demands on parents and ask for greater involvement. Given the variation in the consultative process that was undertaken in each centre, can each centre claim that parents were given every opportunity to participate? From the management and staff viewpoints, parent apathy and inability to be involved due to various reasons such as lack of time was frustrating. It was also very obvious that parents and staff have other demands, from the exosystem, on their time: for example, one parent complained to the Minister that her house was messy because of the time that charter development was taking.

It is mentioned above that charter writing was a more positive process in terms of consultation in centres that had stronger connections with families. For centres who had weaker links with families, the process was a less positive one. For example, centres that had no parent involvement at committee or management level encountered greater problems in getting input or sought comparatively little input. The consultation process also appears to have evoked some negative feedback from parents where there was poor communication or negative centre-family relationships.

Most people involved in carrying out consultation and charter preparation were tiring of the process before the 1 July 1989 deadline. They were annoyed that in order to get their charter accepted, and to receive funding from VOTE: EDUCATION, they had little choice but to accept the charter principles and requirements forced upon them. Most considered that the government's intention for "negotiation" of charters was not simply rhetoric, because true negotiation between themselves and the Ministry on the content of their charters was not permitted. Everyone expressed feelings of frustration when the deadline was changed (again and again), when there was a delay in the requirements being made official, and when they faced charter re-writes.

The changes in requirements for charters, and the deadline for having them approved, caused some emotional strain for the charter writers. There could be long-term implications of some of the pressures that centres experienced to develop a charter. For example, centre staff were reluctant to attend in-service courses because they were so busy with charter-related meetings.

The comments of many participants (namely parents whose participation was of a more voluntary nature than that of staff and managers) after completing their centre's charter suggest that the emotional and physical costs may hold them back from participating again.

Charter development became perceived as a bureaucratic process rather than one that was intrinsically beneficial for centres. It was only after draft charters had been written that benefits of the process were becoming appreciated (for example, the usefulness of the charter document to use in on-going review of areas of the programme).

An important question to examine in looking at the results is whether the procedures carried out in charter development resulted in improvements in centre environments for children. It seems that there were some positive outcomes, for

example the use of Maori words, posters, (etc). However, the claims of centre representatives that consultation and charter preparation made little actual impact on the nature of their programmes suggests that other factors may also be important in affecting what impact charter development has. For example, such factors as staff knowledge of Maori and ability to develop a bicultural programme, along with parents' support of this, were probably more influential than stated intentions in the Treaty of Waitangi section of their charters.

The policy on charter development and requirements for early childhood centres had not been fully developed, clarified, piloted and gazetted before being implemented nationwide. This seemed to be the root of the problems and negative effects of charter development. The policy should have been trialled in a small number of centres or in a community, to identify as many glitches and potential problems as possible before implementation on a national scale. Considerable public relations and education work should have been carried out to make the process of charter writing more meaningful to people and to promote understanding of the national requirements (for example, why the principles of equity or provision for special needs children are important ones). Charter development needed to have been better publicized, to help to counter any negative perceptions of the process from parents' experiences at primary or secondary school level.

Did the process support an understanding of the value of early education and care, and an understanding of what quality in early childhood centres is? The findings suggest that it did, but this benefit was limited in extent by the perception (and the reality it seems) that there was little choice in what centres stated in their final draft charters. This appears to have shaped responses during consultation and charter drafting, and the nature of the charter documents produced.

For full benefit to be obtained, centres needed more time, less pressure, and greater freedom to examine and articulate in their charters how they define quality and aim to provide it. They also needed to know clearly: (a) what the requirements for charter development were, (b) that they could rely on any information given to them by the Ministry of Education and the Early Childhood Development Unit, and (c) that the processes had been developed, and the ground was not going to being changed under them.

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APPENDIX

A. An Informal Survey of Experiences and Feelings About Charter Preparation

HOW DID YOUR CENTRE OBTAIN THE INVOLVEMENT OF VARIOUS GROUPS OF PEOPLE/ORGANIZATIONS? WHAT (IF ANY) PROBLEMS OR SET-BACKS WERE THERE?

Consultation method	How interest maintained	Problems
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		

WERE THERE ANY DIFFERENCES IN OPINION BETWEEN MANAGEMENT/STAFF AND PARENTS/COMMUNITY?

Topic	Points of Disagreement	How Consensus Achieved
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		

HOW RELEVANT WAS CONSULTATION WITH INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS FOR WRITING YOUR CHARTER?

4 = HIGHLY RELEVANT

3 = RELEVANT

2 = SLIGHTLY RELEVANT
1 = NOT RELEVANT

People/groups	Rating	Reasons
1. Parents 2. Community 3. Maori community & consultants 4. Businesses 5. Schools 6. 7. 8. 9. 10.		

WHAT ASPECTS (IF ANY) TO DO WITH WRITING THE TEXT OF YOUR CHARTER HAVE PEOPLE AT YOUR CENTRE EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT?

Charter statement	Concern/argument	Outcome
1. 2. 3. 4. 5.		

B. Proprietor/Director Interview Schedule

CHARTERS

1. How would you define what a charter is?
2. What value do you see in having a charter?
3. What (if any) are the benefits of the process of developing a charter?
4. What (if any) are the disadvantages or negative consequences of charter preparation?
5. What are the main things you would like to see emphasized in your charter?

6. Will you be able to emphasize these things in your charter? Why? Why not?
7. Are you happy with the charter principles as stated in the *Early Childhood Management Handbook?*
8. Do views differ on what should be in the charter? Between staff, parents, and community? On what aspects?
9. How have you/your centre gone about preparing the charter? Have you had a framework or guide-lines to draw upon to assist you?
10. I am interested in the relationship between charters and centre quality: To what extent will your completed charter be a document that reflects the quality of your centre? To what extent will the charter have positive effects on your centre, staff, parents, and children?

CONSULTATION

1. Do you feel that consultation is important?
2. Who has been or will be consulted?
3. How would you define your community?
4. What have been the outcomes of consultation with: parents? community groups? schools? ... ?

NOTE: Further questions were asked but are not relevant to report here for the purpose of this report.